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ABSTRACT

Boston's Title I High School Reading Program (1977-78) was intended to meet the needs of educationally deprived children from low-income families. Although few test scores were available, it appeared that 50 percent of the program students achieved the designated one-year gain in reading comprehension. Only 4 percent of the approximately 425 participants successfuly completed all 123 lessons, and at least 38 percent were absent from 50 to 95 percent of the time. Parental involvement was limited. Materials were late in arriving, and some of them were regarded by staff as inadequate. The diversity of reading levels among participants necessitated the use of extensive individualized instruction rather than a more comprehensive approach and limited the use and benefits of group work. Inservice training for teachers and aides was limited. There was sometimes a lack of coordination between the efforts of remedial and content area teachers, and between program activities and the home and the community. In some schools, facilities were inadequate. Teachers and administrators were generally enthusiastic about the program, though they felt it could be useful for many more students than were actually participating. (CMG)

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Foreword

This final evaluation report for the 1977-78 High School Reading Component funded under Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act presents an appraisal of implementation, administration, scope, and achievements of the program. Recommendations have been included as suggestions for further implementation or for future planning.

The cooperation and assistance of program staff, the component coordinators, and school administrators provided a valuable contribution to the evaluation process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE I HIGH SCHOOL READING

INTRODUCTION

The Title I High School Reading program was intended to provide instruction in reading to meet the special needs of educationally deprived children from low income families. The program was designed to service six high schools with a total enrollment of 720. Limited funding, however, reduced the number of schools to four and program enrollment to 480 students. Each school was staffed with two teachers and two aides. Interviews revealed that student absences and limited materials at the start of the year were the major problems.

Although the Iowa Silent Reading Test was administered, pre-test results were not available until February 1978, necessitating the use of other available scores as a criterion for student selection. Many teachers noted a preference for an objectified checklist rather than standardized testing as a measure of eligibility and progress.

STRENGTHS

Evaluation findings early in the study indicated that although late in starting, the participating staff members had been assigned by the coordinator at the earliest possible time after funding and that they had knowledge and understanding of the program's objectives. Implementation was carried out in accordance with guidelines that had been established. Where planned-for audio materials and equipment were not available, several staff members borrowed them from other sources or used innovative approaches and alternative teacher-prepared materials. As the program progressed, materials such as THINK and SRA kits became plentiful in most situations.

Pupil selection was accomplished in terms of criteria set for the program and included achievement test scores and individual need as determined by pupil records. The Iowa Silent Reading Test was used as an additional criterion measure.

Communication between program and non-program teachers appeared to be, in many instances, positive and constructive. Several program teachers em-

ployed various motivational approaches such as book fairs to stimulate interest in reading. By the end of the year, in almost all rooms, pupil outlines had been well established and many pupils who had poor attendance records were voluntarily coming to program classes.

Assessment throughout the program indicated that involved teachers and administrators were generally enthusiastic about the program and the use and accomplishments of program services in providing remedial instruction. Individualized instruction in terms of diagnosed individual needs were stressed and successful use was made in some instances of the contract approach and of self-maintained pupil records.

WEAKNESSES

The program was slow in starting due to late arrival of materials and equipment. The THINK series was considered an inadequate measure of reading skills by some teachers, who noted that the series neglected comprehension and oral skills, and indicated the need for supplementary and follow-up materials and tests. Students appeared to be bored by the tests, and frequent absences were reported. Interviews with teachers indicated they believed motivational techniques were needed to increase students' attention.

Although the Iowa Silent Reading Test was administered, pre-test results were not available in time for use as a criterion for student selection. Difficulties with scheduling limited the number of students participating in the programs. Teachers indicated that many more students than were participating could benefit from the program.

The diversity of reading levels among program participants necessitated the use of extensive individualized attention rather than a more comprehensive appraoch, and limited the use and benefits of group work.

Preparatory in-service training for teachers and aides in the use of program materials was limited. In some situations, observations revealed a lack of coordination between the efforts of remedial teachers and content teachers, and between program activities and the home and community.

PROBLEMS

Limited funding reduced the number of participating schools and stu-

dents proposed for this program. Materials were limited at the beginning of the year, although all classrooms were subsequently supplied with the THINK series. In some classrooms, availability of appropriate audio equipment was a problem at the beginning of the year. Observations revealed that in some schools, facilities for program activities were inadequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, in addition to those previously made during program implementation, are suggested for consideration.

1. Provide for the programming and scheduling of pupils having similar needs and reading ability ranges in order to provide a degree of homogeneity which would permit broader approaches to the teaching of reading and to the use of diversified teaching techniques and approaches.

2. Provide for in-service training of program staff members through the scheduling of "reading days" during which funded teachers of reading on all levels would have an opportunity to discuss and share innovative and creative approaches and to explore and review available materials of instruction. It is suggested that a room for discussion and display at the Campbell Resource Center be set aside at two different times during the first half of the school year so that the benefits of these scheduled meetings could be realized during the major part of the school year. Because of the limitations on teacher time and the difficulty of releasing teachers during the teaching day, meetings could be scheduled for voluntary attendance during evenings or on Saturdays.

3. Enhance the in-service teacher training program through the provision of resource specialists such as writers of children's books, illustrators, reading specialists, and specialists in elementary and secondary education who would serve either at general meetings as speakers and demonstrators or by going to the various schools to discuss and/or demonstrate innovative and creative approaches with program teachers.

4. Enrich program offerings and approaches through the use of community and citywide library materials. It is suggested that each school contact local libraries and resource agencies to enlist the aid of librarians and resource personnel in the provision of special and community-related library materials and services.

5. Exert efforts to distribute pre-test results as soon as possible in order for them to be used for identification of program students.

6. Develop objective checklists as standard criteria for program eligibility and progress.

FINAL REPORT

TITLE I HIGH SCHOOL READING

OBJECTIVE

To provide an instructional program specifically in reading "to meet the special educational needs of educationally deprived children from low income families."

FINDINGS

Although this reading program was originally designed to service the needs of six high schools with a total projected enrollment of 720, limited funding reduced the number of schools to four with a resulting student enrollment of 480, with a staff of two teachers and two aides in each school to provide specified services. Interview findings revealed that while 120 students were identified in each school as proposed, absences, space limitations, scheduling conflicts, and student transfers caused reduced attendance in program classes.

Although materials were reported to be limited at participating schools at the start of the year, evaluation findings revealed that all schools were subsequently equipped with the THINK series and necessary audio machines including headphones and tapes. Teachers indicated a belief that the THINK series did not provide an adequate measure of reading skills because the aspect of comprehension was not sufficiently addressed in the prepared lessons. It was reported that the series also assumed a hierarchy of reading skills which was, in most cases, absent, and that instructional tapes allowed too much time lapse between the response and the succeeding question, often causing students to become disinterested and distracted. Several teachers stated that these difficulties mitigated against the effectiveness of the series as a learning instrument. Several teachers and aides developed activities to supplement commercially designed materials. In addition, evaluation findings revealed that many teachers ordered new materials, and that one of the remedial teachers prepared a special listing of these for future distribution.

The Iowa Silent Reading Test was administered in November 1977 and in May 1978. Although results of the November test were not available to teachers until February 1978, other available scores were substituted as a

criterion for student selection. For tenth grade students, the results of last year's Iowa Silent Reading Test were used and last year's Metro 70 test scores were used for ninth graders. However, there were some students for whom no previous achievement records were available largely because of the high rate of student mobility. In such cases, teachers reported that tests were substituted which were more readily accessible, such as Gates-McGinitie and Orbit, to determine program eligibility. Many teachers noted a preference for an objectified checklist as a measure of eligibility and student progress rather than the standardized testing. According to interviews, although data from these tests would not be available from all schools for comparison prior to late summer, test scores from the Gates-McGinitie reading test were available from one of the schools participating in the program. An analysis of the results of the Comprehension section of this test revealed an average gain in grade-normed scores of 1.05 years in reading comprehension or .05 years above the intended objective.

Further analysis of the data indicated that as many students achieved the designated one-year gain in reading comprehension as failed to achieve it and further, that there appeared to be no differential effects with respect to the interaction of initial level of comprehension and achievement of the objective. That is, students with initially low test scores were just as likely to achieve the one-year gain in test scores as were those with higher initial test scores.

It should also be noted that fully 18% of those students tested registered no gains in test scores over the course of the year or actually showed a loss in test scores. Another 32% failed to achieve the desired objective, yielding a total of 50% failing to achieve the initial objective.

Preliminary analysis of the lesson data for the High School Reading Program indicated that only 4% of the approximately 425 participating students successfully completed all 123 lessons. Twenty percent of the students completed at least 70% of the lessons and 49% of the students completed at least half of the lessons. It should be noted that these percentages fluctuated greatly between classrooms with some reporting few students completing more than 20 - 25% of the lessons and others showing large numbers of students progressing through 70 - 80% of the lessons.

Attendance figures were also low. Examination of records indicated

that at least 38% of those participating in the program were absent from 50-95% of the time. These figures also fluctuated from class to class.

According to interviews with staff members, no parent advisory council was established to coordinate home and school activities, and involvement by individual parents was minimal.

Evaluation findings indicated that limited preparatory in-service training was conducted to orient teachers to the program and materials. A feedback session was held for teachers with a sales representative to offer reactions to the THINK series after having used it for a year. According to interviews, provision was not made for teachers to share supplementary materials or ideas regarding program implementation and instruction. Observations revealed that program teachers did not work with content teachers as proposed.

DISCUSSION

Because of the diversity of reading ability of program participants, it was necessary for the program staff to make extensive use of an individualized approach. Although this appeared to be most appropriate under the circumstances, it is believed by the evaluators that the benefits to be derived through group work and through a cooperative approach were minimized. Extreme heterogeneity on the part of program participants appeared to make a comprehensive approach and use of various methodologies and techniques impracticable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, in addition to those previously made during program implementation, are suggested for consideration.

1. Provide for the programming and scheduling of pupils to classes with pupils having similar needs and reading ability ranges in order to provide a degree of homogeneity which would permit broader approaches to the teaching of reading and to the use of diversified teaching techniques and approaches.

2. Provide for in-service training of program staff members through the scheduling of "reading days" during which funded teachers of reading on all levels would have an opportunity to discuss and share innovative and creative approaches and to explore and review available materials of instruction. It is suggested that a room for discussion and display at the Campbell Resource Center be set

aside at two different times during the first half of the school year so that the benefits of these scheduled meetings could be realized during the major part of the school year. Because of the limitations on teacher time and the difficulty of releasing teachers during the teaching day, meetings could be scheduled for voluntary attendance during evenings or on Saturdays.

3. Enhance the in-service teacher training program through the provision of resource specialists such as writers of children's books, illustrators, reading specialists, and specialists in elementary and secondary education who would serve either at general meetings as speakers and demonstrators or by going to the various schools to discuss and/or demonstrate innovative and creative approaches with program teachers.

4. Enrich program offerings and approaches through the use of community and citywide library materials. It is suggested that each school contact local libraries and resource agencies to enlist the aid of librarians and resource personnel in the provision of special and community-related library materials and services.

5. Exert efforts to distribute pre-test results as soon as possible in order for them to be used for identification of program students.

6. Develop objective checklists as standard criteria for program eligibility and progress.

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